

Contact with nature may mean more social cohesion, less crime

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Numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of contact with nature for human well-being. However, despite strong trends toward greater urbanization and declining green space, little is known about the social consequences of such contact. In the December issue of *BioScience*, an international, interdisciplinary team reports on how they used nationally representative data from the United Kingdom and stringent model testing to examine the relationships between objective measures and self-reported assessments of contact with nature, community cohesion, and local crime incidence.

The results in the report, by Netta Weinstein of Cardiff University and others, were notable. After accounting for a range of possibly interfering factors, including socioeconomic deprivation, population density, [unemployment rate](#), socioeconomic standing, and weekly wages, the authors determined that people's experiences of local nature reported via a survey could explain 8% of a measure of the variation, called variance, in survey responses about perceptions of community cohesion. They describe this as "a striking finding given that individual predictors such as income, gender, age, and education together accounted for only 3%" of the variance.

The relationship with crime was similarly striking. According to the study results, objective measures of the amount of green space or farmland accessible in people's neighborhoods accounted for 4% additional variance in crime rates. The authors argue that this predictive power compares favorably with known contributors to crime, such as

[socioeconomic deprivation](#), which accounts for 5% variance in crime rates. "The positive impact of local nature on neighbors' mutual support may discourage crime, even in areas lower in socioeconomic factors," they write. Further, given the political importance placed on past crime reductions as small as 2%-3%, the authors suggest that findings such as theirs could justify policies aimed at ameliorating [crime](#) by improving contact with nature.

Finally, the authors note that, unlike some easily measured ecosystem services (e.g., the provision of water or food), "the apparent benefits of contact with nature on social cohesion... are more challenging to tease apart and measure." However, they express the hope that their study "stimulates consideration of how best to ensure that nature, at many different levels, can continue to benefit individuals and society into the future."

More information: *BioScience*, [dx.doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biv151](https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biv151)

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